

foreign debt outstanding is for March 31, 1996. The debt outstanding for the last three years was as follows :

(US dollar millions)

31.3.94	31.3.95	31.3.96
92,695	99,008	92,199

The total foreign debt cannot be quantified by country of origin since there are components, e.g. multilateral debt which by definition are not bilateral. In addition, bond holdings have an investor profile spread across countries. They also change hands when they are traded at exchanges.

(c) The total amount of principal repayment and interest payments during the last three years is as under :

(US dollar millions)

	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96
Principal Repayments	4,783	6,825	8,063
Interest payments	3,818	4,099	4,315
Total Debt Servicing	8,601	10,924	12,378

(d) The main features of debt management strategy followed by the Government includes sustaining a high growth rate of exports, encouraging non-debt creating capital inflows and keeping the maturity structure as well as the total amount of commercial debt under control. As a result, debt service ratio has come down from the high of 35.25 per cent in 1990-91 to 25.70 per cent in 1995-96. Debt to GDP ratio has also come down from the peak of 41.00 per cent in 1991-92 to 28.71 per cent in 1995-96.

[Translation]

Amendment in R.P. Act, 1950

146. SHRI BRIJ BUSHAN TIWARI : Will the Minister of LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government are contemplating to bring any Bill to repeal the Section 77 of Representation of the People Act, 1950 in order to conduct free and fair elections,

(b) if so, the details thereof, and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LEGAL AFFAIRS, LEGISLATIVE DEPARTMENT AND DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP) : (a) to (c) Section 77 does not exist in Representation of the People Act, 1950. A proposal to make certain amendments in the section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, is, however, amongst the proposals on electoral reforms which are being discussed by Government with the political parties.

[English]

Misuse of Gold Import Policy

147. SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government are aware that a large quantity of gold are being brought into the country under the new gold import policy and reaching the hands of smugglers through couriers,

(b) if so, the steps taken to prevent misuse of Gold Import Policy by the smugglers; and

(c) the quantity and value of gold imported through Calicut Airport after the introduction of the liberalised Gold Import Policy ?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : (a) and (b) The Government have increased the limit of gold which can be brought by Non Resident Indians after six months' stay abroad, and on payment of appropriate duty in foreign exchange, from 5 kg. to 10 kg. There is no restriction in the import policy or under any Customs Notification on subsequent sale or transfer of the gold after its clearance on payment of duty.

(c) 12.80 tonnes gold valued at Rs. 640.55 crores was imported through Calicut Airport from 1/1/97 to 15/2/97.

Unincorporated Companies

148. DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have issued ordinance to curb unincorporated companies comprising partnership firms and combination of individuals seeking funds from public at higher rates of interest;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor, and

(c) the extent to which this is likely to help in companies and firms and the time by which this ordinance will take effect ?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : (a) to (c) Several finance companies and unincorporated bodies have reportedly failed to repay the deposits received from depositors who have been tempted by the attractive returns and incentives offered. In view of the need to take urgent steps to further regulate the activities of such companies and unincorporated bodies in order to protect the interests of depositors the Reserve Bank of India (Amendment) Ordinance, 1997 to further amend the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 has been promulgated by the President on 9th Jan. 97. The amendments, *inter-alia*, provide that with effect from 1st April, 1997 the unincorporated bodies may accept deposits from any person, other than their relatives, only for personal use and not for lending or business purposes. The new provisions are expected to lead to the emergence of stronger financial companies which can better subserve the public good.